



Department of Justice

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
THURSDAY, JUNE 17, 2004

619-557-5275

<http://www.usdoj.gov/usao/cas/index.html>

LOCAL OFFICIALS TEAM UP WITH NATIONAL LEADERSHIP TO REDUCE GUN CRIME IN OUR COMMUNITY

San Diego, California – The national Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN) conference met this week in Kansas City, Missouri and included a 12 – person delegation from the San Diego, California area. Attorney General John Ashcroft spoke to over 1,150 federal, state, and local prosecutors, law enforcement officials, community leaders, and other members of the PSN teams from across the nation who came together to discuss efforts to reduce and prosecute gun crime. PSN is President Bush’s comprehensive initiative to combat gun crime in America by providing locally-based programs with the tools and resources they need to succeed.

“Through Project Safe Neighborhood’s unprecedented partnership of state, local and federal leaders, we are turning the tide on gun crime,” said Attorney General John Ashcroft. “We are taking gun-wielding criminals off our streets. The last three years represent a record of great success, but working together, we can do even more to make our neighborhoods safe.”

Federal Gun Crime Prosecutions Have Increased Significantly Every Year Under Project Safe Neighborhoods. From FY 2000 to FY 2003, federal firearms prosecutions increased by 68%. In FY 2003, the Justice Department filed over 10,500 federal firearms cases—the highest number ever recorded by the Department. The number of defendants charged with federal gun crimes rose from approximately 10,600 to over 13,000 from FY 2002 to FY 2003, a record increase of almost 23%. These figures are the highest on record in a single year since the Department began recording this information. In FY 2003, nearly all — 93% — of convicted defendants, who were originally charged with federal firearms offenses, were sentenced to some time in prison for convictions on firearms charges or other charges. 72% were sentenced to more than three years in prison, and over half of all defendants convicted were sentenced to more than five years in federal prison. State and local prosecutions have also increased.

Project Safe Neighborhoods Is Working In San Diego. The United States Attorney’s Office, working side by side with state and local law enforcement, prosecutors and other community leaders, has created a PSN strategy to fit the unique gun crime problem in the Southern District of California. Criminals who use guns are prosecuted under federal, state, or local laws, depending on which jurisdiction can provide the most appropriate punishment. The PSN Task Force includes representatives from the San Diego County District Attorney’s Office, San Diego County Sheriff’s Department, San Diego Police Department, RAND Corporation (crime analyst/research partner), San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG) (media/community

outreach partner), the non-profit San Diego Children's Initiative and Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF). Other organizations that have participated in the efforts of the Task Force include the U.S. Attorney's San Diego Violent Crimes Task Force, the non-profit San Diego Crime Commission, San Diego City Attorney's Office, and the El Centro, Escondido, National City, Oceanside, and El Cajon Police Departments. The San Diego County District Attorney serves as the Fiscal Agent for the PSN Task Force.

During calendar year 2004, law enforcement initiatives funded by the PSN Task Force included \$90,000 to the San Diego County District Attorney's Office, Gang Prosecution Unit, providing funding for overtime, equipment and operations in support of increased enforcement activity relating to gang-related violent crime in the Southeastern Division. Funds were also provided to the San Diego Police Department, Street Gang Unit (\$80,765) for overtime, equipment, and training in support of increased enforcement relating to gang violence.

Two youth firearms violence reduction initiatives have been funded; One, The Children's Initiative, received \$80,035 to coordinate the implementation of the Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF) Gang Resistance and Education Program (GREAT) in at least ten schools in high gang activity areas; to implement a Gun Safety Campaign to reduce youth access to firearms; to educate parents, educators, and the community on gun safety issues and storage; and to provide free gun locks. The second, Social Advocates for Youth (SAY) San Diego, Inc., received \$79,680 to implement Handgun Violence Prevention Curriculum in eight after-school programs (5th through 8th grade) in neighborhoods where handgun violence has been identified as a problem.

Project Safe Neighborhoods Has Contributed to Decreasing the National Violent Crime Rate to Its Lowest Levels in 30 Years, But Reducing Gun Crime Remains an Important Goal. The violent crime rate is now at its lowest level since 1973, when the Justice Department's Bureau of Justice Statistics started collecting criminal victimization data. The violent crime rate for the first two years of the Bush Administration (2001-2002) was nearly 21% lower than for 1999-2000. The per capita number of violent crimes *involving firearms* has dropped 14% in 2001-2002, from 1999-2000. There were approximately 64,000 fewer gun crimes and approximately 12% (almost 130,000) fewer victims of gun crime in 2001-2002, than in 1999-2000.

Project Safe Neighborhoods Takes a Multifaceted Approach to Reducing Gun Crime. Gun crime reduction is President Bush's top domestic criminal justice initiative, and the Bush Administration has devoted over \$1 billion to Project Safe Neighborhoods in its first four years (FY 2001 to FY 2004). The funds have been used to hire new federal, state, and local prosecutors, provide training, hire research and community outreach support, and develop and promote effective prevention and deterrence efforts. The PSN Task Force in each of the 94 federal judicial districts engages in deterrence and prevention efforts through community outreach and media campaigns and ensures that law enforcement and prosecutors have the training they need. For example, the San Diego PSN Task Force awarded \$56,200 to the San Diego County Sheriff's Crime Lab to hire a dedicated National Integrated Ballistic Information Network (NIBIN) technician trained to enter computerized images of fired cartridge cases and bullets from crime scenes and search for possible matches. By training an NIBIN technician, hundreds, if not thousands, of cartridge cases and bullets may be entered into the database that would have never been imaged but for PSN funding.

To find out more about PSN visit the PSN website at www.psn.gov.